

Wanderers hold Chelsea to 0-0 draw

Wycombe Wanderers 0, Chelsea XI 0

REPORT BY STUART EARP

WYCOMBE Wanderers were unlucky not to add another professional scalp to their conquests at Loakes Park last night (Monday) when they were held to a goalless draw by a strong Chelsea XI that included first teamers Graham Wilkins, Peter Houseman and John Dempsey.

Wanderers, who fielded an almost full strength side, had by far the better chances and made most of the running but failed to break through a tough Chelsea back-four that was led by Dempsey's no-nonsense example. Poor finishing also contributed to Wanderers' inability to score.

From the spectators' point of view, this friendly was disappointing. Neither side allowed the other to play fluently and there were too many niggling challenges and fouls which marred the match as a spectacle. Time and space were at a premium in this match and consequently the football was often hurried.

There were times when Wycombe broke away in force, but a series of deflections or a mass of bodies denied them the goal they deserved. The Blues, however, certainly won this one on points, recording 11 corners to Chelsea's two. The pressure could also be gauged by the amount of work home goalkeeper John Maskell had to do in the 90 minutes. John, in fact, did not make a serious save throughout.

One of the key points of interest in the game was the appearance of Kenny Swain, who spent a few months with Wycombe before going pro with Chelsea two years ago. Unfortunately, Ken did not come on until late in the game as substitute and all too little was seen of his talents.

The match got off to a flying start in the very first minute when Dylan Evans — playing in place of Tony Horseman — hit the stanchion but Chelsea were soon replying with neat attacks full of first-time passing. Unfortunately it didn't last.

Keith Searle twice tested keeper Derek Richardson in the first quarter and then Steve Perrin volleyed perfectly for the top right hand corner only to see Richardson push the ball away with a brilliant reflex save. Wanderers began to turn on the pressure after that but with Chelsea taking no chances, the home attacks often ended with the visitors passing back to the keeper.

Upfront, the Chelsea forwards were well held by Wycombe's centre backs although left back Gary Hand struggled to find his usual high standard. On the other flank, Dave Alexander again looked good in the number two shirt and apart from one poor back pass, he seemed tailor-made for the position.

After a goalless first half, Wycombe pressed strongly after the interval and only a few inches robbed them of the lead in the 49th minute. Howard Kennedy drove in a free kick to the six yard box where Steve Perrin swooped in to power a header goalwards. Richardson was beaten all the way as the ball flew towards the net but then struck the underside of the crossbar. A couple of minutes later, Keith Mead sent a 35 yard drive flying past the upright.

The competitive pattern of the first half continued after the interval with neither side able to get any clean strikes at goal. Swain came on in the 61st minute but was rarely given the ball out on the left flank. A little heavier than in his Wycombe days, he looked full of skills when in possession but he was unable to make any real impression against the home defence.

As the game progressed, Wanderers looked more likely

allowed Wycombe sufficient time to re-group their defences. Peter Houseman was guilty of this, although in the first half, his accurate passing had looked particularly dangerous.

In the last 15 minutes Wanderers had a number of chances to clinch the match but poor finishing let them down badly. Both Perrin and Kennedy sent the ball high over the crossbar while other opportunities were blocked by the massed Chelsea defences.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; D. Alexander, K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Hand; H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Hollifield; D. Evans, K. Searle, S. Perrin. Subs O. Griffiths, D. Bullock (not used).

CHelsea: D. Richardson; M. Sorensen, T. Cunningham, J. Dempsey, G. Wilkins; R. Lewington (sub L. Briley 45 mins), P. Houseman, B. Bason; E. Maybank, G. Stanley, C. Walker (sub K. Swain 61 mins).

Referee: W. Cleere (High Wycombe).
Official paying attendance: 930.

to break the deadlock, thanks mainly to the skills of Terry Reardon in midfield. Apart from winning the ball more than any other player, he used it intelligently to set the Wanderers attacks in motion time and again.

The chances began to appear for Wycombe. In the 67th minute Alexander volleyed over the bar when unmarked after an excellent first-time cross by Searle and then seven minutes later a brilliant flick by Reardon put Dempsey under pressure. As Perrin challenged, the Chelsea centre half was forced to head just over his own crossbar.

When Chelsea did reply, they wasted their chances by holding onto the ball too long. On a number of occasions they outnumbered Wycombe's defence but by delaying the pass, they